

Dr Daisy's Blog at  
Menopause Matters. This time...

# Understanding Obesity and Menopause Part II



## Could HRT be beneficial for weight loss?

Taking HRT might even be **beneficial** for control of body weight. By increasing estrogen levels, this may potentially reduce visceral fat deposition, and negatively affect weight gain.

One **2006 meta-analysis** of more than 100 randomised studies of women without diabetes, using HRT, concluded that both oral (tablet), and transdermal (patch/gel), HRT resulted in reduced amounts of abdominal fat.

However, because of the small risks of stroke, heart attack and breast cancer, associated

with HRT use, HRT is not currently prescribed primarily to aid or support weight loss.

## Which type of HRT is best to avoid weight gain?

If you are considering using HRT and worried about weight gain, then the transdermal (patch/gel) HRT seems to offer the most favourable risk-benefit equation.

With transdermal (patch/gel) HRT, because estrogen is absorbed through the skin, and is not swallowed and then absorbed from the stomach, less hormone passes through the liver. This means that transdermal (patch/gel) HRT has less effect on other biochemical parameters, such as blood clotting factors, for example.

## How can middle-aged women lose weight?

The most important tools for weight loss are calorie consumption and increased physical exercise.

## Calorie consumption

As a general rule, 1200 -1500 Kcal day should result in a weight loss of 0.5 - 0.75 lb per week.



There are numerous diets to choose from, all with relative benefits and disadvantages.

## Diets

- [The Mediterranean Diet](#) is highly recommended. This has a moderate fat intake and involves plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, legumes, seeds and nuts.
- [Very low calorie diets](#) have been recently advocated.
- [Meal replacements diets](#) are an option.

For the best advice, why not see your GP, and/or discuss your options with a dietitian?

Keeping a [food diary](#) has been shown to help weight loss. You should write down everything you eat every day, and try to stick to your calorie regime.

## Physical activity


Physical activity cannot be underestimated. It's of key importance to avoid becoming sedentary and to get moving! Being sedentary is a predictor for increasing waist size and obesity.

Sedentariness is a bigger risk factor for obesity than ageing and menopause.

For example, [a 2016 meta-analysis](#) of women randomised to walk regularly, compared to a no-exercise group, showed clear benefits in terms of weight loss and reduced body fat in the walking groups.

As a minimum women are recommended to **take 120-150 minutes of brisk walking per week**. Brisk walking is walking where it is interrupting your ability to speak and you feel a bit sweaty.





However, this needs to be coupled with calorie restriction to result in weight loss.

Exercise results in numerous health benefits. It improves glucose metabolism, helps lower blood pressure and overall leads to a reduction in strokes, heart attacks and diabetes. The more exercise you can do the better! And you don't need an expensive gym! The world is a gym!

Walk, don't take the bus. Use the stairs, not the lift. Go the long way round! Get up off the sofa, do the housework, run up and down the stairs, get the gardening done, take those things to the tip! Get busy! Find a hobby you enjoy, join a walking group, get out and about on your feet! The more active you are, the more you prompt your metabolism to get on and use up some body fat!

I have a Fitbit for example, and I record my steps every day. It's become a lot of fun.

## How to make life changes

It can be difficult to make significant life changes, especially if you are suffering from anxiety or depression.

Set yourself small goals. Every journey starts with one small step.

Loneliness is recognised as a risk factor for weight gain. It can be hard to overcome loneliness, especially if your self-esteem is low and you are anxious or depressed. However, you can find out about local clubs and societies, and try to join in. Slimming Clinics like Slimming World and Weight Watcher's provide friendly, supportive meetings and are often very successful and in helping you lose weight.

## Other strategies for weight loss

### Weight loss medications

There are a variety of different medications available to aid weight loss. These are generally only prescribed for women who have been unable to lose weight by other means and have a BMI of  $>30 \text{ kg/m}^2$ .

In their 2017 Recommendations for the Management of Obesity, The National Institute of

Health and Care and Excellence (NICE) endorsed the use of two anti-obesity drugs - [orlistat](#) and [liraglutide](#).

A large meta-analysis involving 29,000 patients concluded that a number of weight-loss drugs, including orlistat, liraglutide, and also the appetite suppressants, phentermine and diethylpropion, were all effective treatments, resulting in an average weight loss of 5% of body weight after 52 weeks treatment.

Orlistat and liraglutide are available on NHS prescription. Phentermine and diethylpropion are not available on the NHS but can be prescribed from private UK slimming clinics.

## Weight loss surgery

In cases where diet and exercise alone have failed, [bariatric surgery](#) is an option. There are a variety of different procedures available, such as gastric balloons, gastric bands, and partial gastrectomy.

You can be [referred](#) by your GP for bariatric surgery if you have a BMI over 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, or a BMI of >35 plus additional risk factors such as diabetes. It's well worth making an appointment to discuss your options if this is a possible acceptable option for you.

## Final thoughts

The most important thing to take away from reading this, is that natural ageing causes weight gain in women – not going through menopause, or taking HRT.

Your weight is intricately associated with your health. If you are reading this, know you are overweight or obese, and are unhappy about it, now is the time to take action.

There are lots of ideas here you can take forward and embark on a healthier life and a happier you!

You can do this for yourself, and with luck, have a less problematic menopause and a healthier, more-fulfilling old age!



Don't let your weight get you down!

Talk to your GP or menopause specialist.

***Daisy Mae x***

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